



2026 Consumer Trends

Turning Consumer Insights into
Effective Packaging Strategies



Unpack The Report



The Middle Ages

Optimizing an
expanded midlife



Alpha Power

A new generation
of influence



Comfort Zone

Simplicity and familiarity
in a time of stress



Seamless Commerce

Channel strategies for
busy consumers



Introduction

At Berlin Packaging, finding or creating the right packaging solution doesn't start with materials, structures, or drawings—it starts with the consumer. Every packaging suggestion or design decision is rooted in understanding the shopper: who they are, what they value, and how their behaviors are evolving. By tracking consumer attitudes and preferences throughout the year, we ensure our customers have packaging that wins on the shelf, online, and in the hands of their target audience.

Rising prices are affecting today's consumers, prompting more intentional, cost-conscious decision-making. Economic uncertainty and geopolitical conflict are increasing stress levels, prompting consumers to seek familiar, comforting products. Meanwhile, younger generations are shaping markets earlier than ever, while older consumers are enjoying longer, more dynamic lives. At the same time, digitalization has transformed the way people discover and interact with brands. These forces are redefining what people want and need from products and from packaging.

This report outlines four consumer shifts that will influence packaging in 2026 and beyond.

*The brands mentioned in this report are trademarks of their respective owners. Inclusion of these brands in this report is not meant to imply an association with or endorsement from the respective trademark owners.



1.

The Middle Ages

Optimizing an expanded midlife

Last year, we featured “lively longevity” as one of our top consumer trends for 2025, exploring how brands can appeal to older consumers as they live longer. This year, the trend expands to encompass a broader phenomenon—the expansion of the middle years. Mintel calls it The New Young, noting “As longevity increases and traditional milestones become more fluid, we’re seeing the rise of an extended middle of life.” This shift isn’t simply about appealing to aging consumers—it’s about recognizing that people in midlife are more active, more engaged, more digitally savvy, and more empowered than previous generations. They are living in the moment, investing in experiences now vs saving for a distant retirement, starting new jobs, exploring new hobbies, and making life changes later in life. According to Mintel, “Reinvention will become a normalized way to approach life, at any age.”

“Fulfillment is no longer front-loaded into youth or deferred to retirement.” (Mintel)

As consumers in this stage pursue reinvention, seek new experiences, and redefine what it means to be in midlife, they want brands to help them optimize their extended years. Package design that is experiential, champions self-expression, supports active lifestyles, and embraces age-positive messaging aligns with this mindset. By creating unique experiences through custom design, enabling on-the-go use with portable formats, and avoiding ageist cues with positive messaging and inclusive imagery, brands can demonstrate that they understand The New Young’s priorities and are committed to supporting their vitality and creativity.





2.

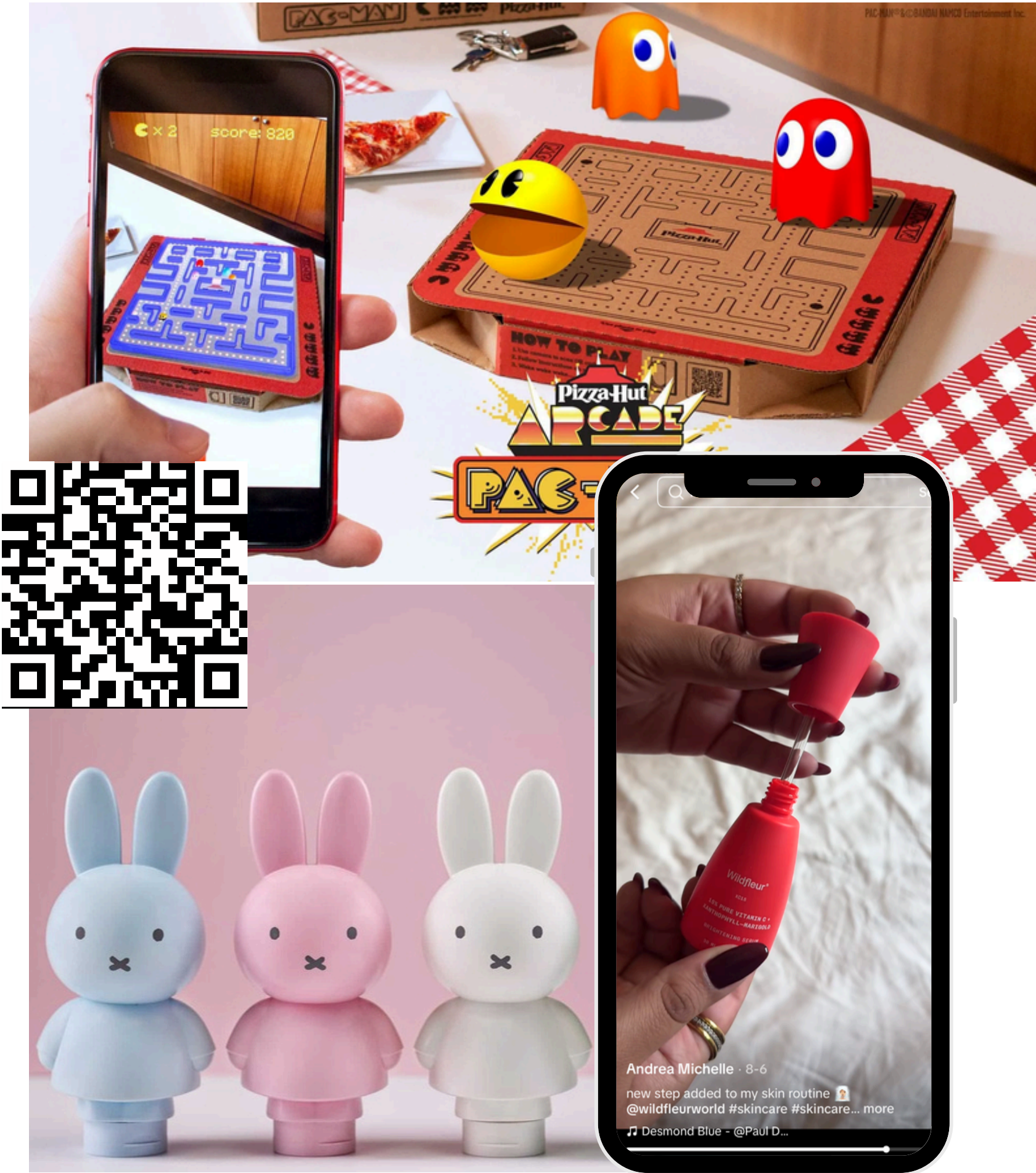
Alpha Power

A new generation
of influence

In recent years, all eyes have been on Gen Z. But now Gen Alpha—including teens, tweens, and younger children—is coming of age and rapidly gaining spending power. As GWI put it, “Gen Alpha’s turning sixteen – and it’s time to take them seriously.” Their early financial influence is unprecedented. Mintel notes that “Gen Alpha is entering the financial landscape earlier than any generation before.” GWI data show that over half of children ages 8–11 and nearly three-quarters of those ages 12–15 are making purchase decisions, either alone or with parents. Their influence is visible across markets—from the video game industry, which has long targeted younger consumers, to beauty categories that teens and tweens are discovering earlier than ever.

“Gen Alpha has surpassed \$100 billion in spending power.”
(Fortune)

Digitally native and socially aware, this generation expects brands to engage them in immersive, shareable ways. Insta-worthy design, socially connected packaging, and smart labels (like AR and QR codes) are appealing because they speak the visual, digital-first language Gen Alpha is already fluent in. Eye-catching packaging becomes not just a container but a piece of content to post. Gamified or socially enabled features allow these consumers to connect with brands—and each other—in unique ways. Smart labels bridge the physical-digital gap by enabling interactive experiences on the devices they already use. These packaging solutions turn everyday products into engaging, digital touchpoints that appeal to Gen Alpha.





3.

Comfort Zone

Simplicity and familiarity
in a time of stress

Economic uncertainty, political polarization, and global instability are leading to elevated levels of stress and anxiety for today's consumers. As a result, they are actively seeking effective and efficient products that deliver ease, comfort, and calm. According to NielsenIQ, "With rising cognitive fatigue, simplicity is critical," and Euromonitor notes "A 'less but better' approach is the new standard as they embrace simplicity and practical comfort." Home continues to serve as a sanctuary where people can relax and decompress. Consumers are embracing self-care routines that promote mental and emotional wellness. And there is growing demand for better-for-you food and beverages that utilize high quality, clean ingredients.

“Product labeling has become essential relative to earning trust and aligning with consumer values.” (NielsenIQ)

When it comes to packaging, simplicity is key. Minimalist package design can be effective in creating a sense of calm and relaxation. Simple graphics, clean lines, and straightforward typography provide visual relief and reduce cognitive load. With fewer elements competing for attention, the most important ones stand out, giving clarity and ease. Studio One Eleven's branding experts understand the nuances of minimalist design and create solutions that are effective and impactful. There is also growing demand for retro and nostalgic packaging and product design that feels familiar. GlobalData says, "As consumers look backward for stability, they wish to have a lifestyle with simpler and familiar options."





4.

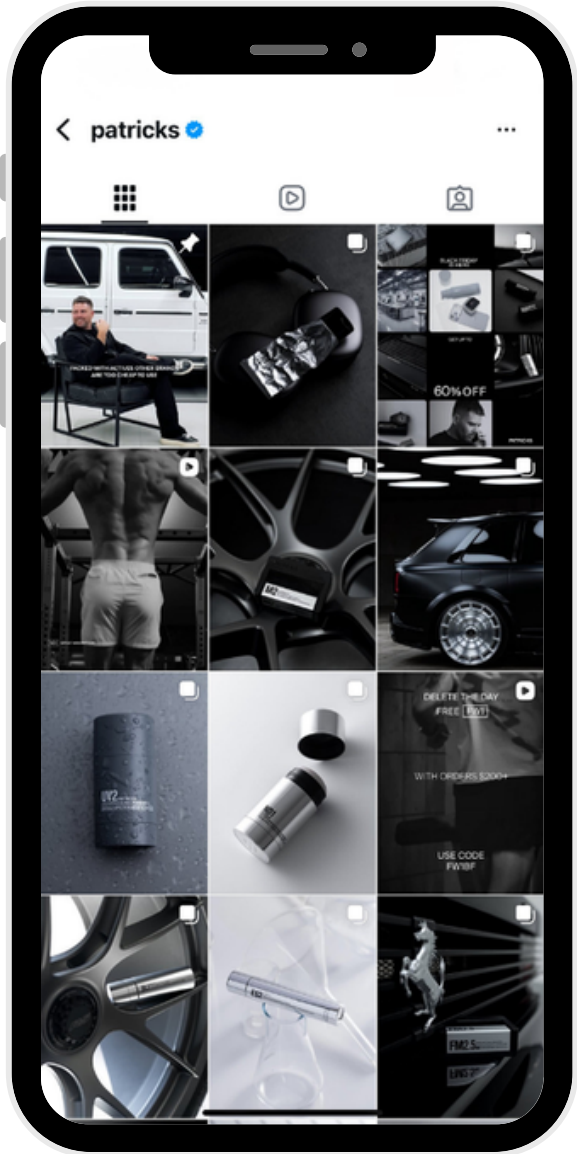
Seamless Commerce

Channel strategies
for busy consumers

Increasingly busy consumers are looking for anything that simplifies their daily routines—including how they shop. They want buying experiences that remove complexity and seek “frictionless, personalized, and instant shopping pathways” according to NielsenIQ. Retail evolved from traditional stores to e-commerce, then to social and quick commerce, and now consumers shop fluidly across stores, websites, apps, and social platforms. NielsenIQ notes, “Commerce is undergoing a transformation: Consumers no longer shop channels; they move across platforms, touchpoints, and moments.” In this environment, brands must adopt an omni-channel approach to meet consumers wherever they are and create the seamless commerce experience they now expect.

Brands, retailers, and manufacturers need to deliver everywhere, all at once.

Packaging needs to stand out on crowded store shelves and attract consumers’ attention within a few seconds. Custom structures, eye-catching branding, and unique secondary packaging solutions can break through in a sea of sameness. Beyond the shelf, packaging needs to perform for e-commerce. Berlin Packaging has e-commerce expertise, including knowledge of Amazon’s extensive packaging requirements, sustainable shipping strategies (such as lightweighting), quality control capabilities, and more. Today’s packaging needs to perform on social media, driving digital discovery and engagement through buzz-worthy design.



Why we Switched to POUCHES

Weights 71% less and contains 2x more product

Less transportation

Helps us avoid 14.6 tons of CO2 emissions/year

THE POWER OF PURE
NON-TOXIC BIODEGRADABLE
BRANCH BASICS
100% NATURAL MINERALS
OXYGEN BOOST
WHITENS & BRIGHTENS • REMOVES STAINS & ODORS
NO BLEACH OR AMMONIA • NO DYES OR FRAGRANCES
NET WEIGHT 4 LB (1.8 KG)



Berlin Packaging exclusive e-commerce ready pump



Turning Consumer Insights Into Action

Consumer demographics, priorities, and behaviors are constantly evolving. Longer lifespans are leading to an expanded midlife, with people investing in experiences and themselves. Meanwhile, the youngest consumers, Gen Alpha, are entering the marketplace and demonstrating their spending power. Increasingly elevated stress levels are driving consumers to seek products and services that provide comfort. And busy lifestyles are changing how and where people shop, making omni-channel retail strategies more important than ever.

To keep pace, brands must leverage these emerging trends—and Berlin Packaging is here to help. With tens of thousands of stock components, exclusive offerings, custom design services, sustainability expertise, quality-control capabilities, and end-to-end supply chain management, we're more than a packaging supplier. We're a full-service business partner positioned to help brands win in 2026 and beyond. As the world's largest Hybrid Packaging Supplier®, we bring unparalleled scale, expertise, and innovation to every brand we support.

Anything Is Possible®

With over 100 years in the packaging industry, more than 2,000 packaging professionals, and a global network of suppliers and warehouses, we offer 50,000+ SKUs of plastic, glass, and metal containers, closures, and dispensing systems across all markets for customers just like you.

Our Business Model

Berlin Packaging combines the best elements of manufacturing, distribution and logistics, and value-added service providers to deliver cost-effective packaging solutions to our customers. Our mission is to improve our customers' net income through packaging products and services. We are the world's largest Hybrid Packaging Supplier®.



**Best Elements of
a Manufacturer**

+



**Distribution
& Logistics**

+



**Value-Added
Specialty Services**

Value-Added Specialty Services

Our compelling suite of solutions addresses your needs and unlocks profit.

- Custom Design & Innovation
- Quality Service Management
- Global Sourcing & Services
- Inventory Management Services
- Sustainable Packaging Solutions
- Customer Portal Efficiency

